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AN
ESSAY
ON
THE INVENTION
OF
ALPHABETIC WRITING.

Read, May 8th, 1815.

THE difficulty of accounting for the invention of Alphabetic Writing, and the impossibility of tracing any connexion between letters, which are the representatives of sounds, and hieroglyphics which are resemblances of things, has induced men of extraordinary erudition and talents, to ascribe the gift to a direct revelation from heaven. And when we consider the prodigious sagacity, the wonderful powers of discrimination, the profundity of thought, and the almost infinite comprehension requisite to analyse words into their component parts—sounds appearing simple, into sounds still more simple—to discover that the multitude of words in a language are composed of a very small number of sounds—to ascertain precisely this small number, and to

annex a mark to each, we shall not be astonished that the eminent men to whom I have alluded, should deem the human mind incapable of such an effort, and esteem it necessary to cut the knot by a miraculous intervention of the Deity.

Hartley conjectures that the communication was first made to Moses, on the delivery, at mount Sinai, of the two tables which the sacred historian declares to have been written by the finger of God;* and Wakefield (who, still less than Hartley, can be suspected of weakness or credulity) supports a similar opinion by very convincing arguments,† without adverting, however, to the particular occasion on which the revelation was made to the Hebrews, or even referring to the discussion of Hartley on the subject. But so great are the achievements, so extensive the dominion attempted and attained by the mind of man, that I am more inclined to solve the difficulty in a natural way, by ascribing the discovery to those exertions which have hitherto found a specific for every want, as soon as the want was felt, rather than assume, without manifest necessity, a departure from the course of nature, and those laws by which Providence visibly governs the world.

It may be said that when alphabetic writing was first adopted, there was not such a want of the means of re-

* Hartley on Man, 1st v. 308. octavo edition.

† Second Appendix to Gilbert Wakefield's Life.

ording events, opinions, and laws, as would spur the human mind to the exertions requisite to this great discovery. Mankind must have been in possession of Picture-writing, Hieroglyphics, or that improvement upon them which exists at present among the Chinese, and these were sufficient for all their purposes. They are, it is true, greatly inferior to the alphabetic mode of writing; but as the former could never improve into the latter—as they are each perfectly distinct and unconnected in their kinds—as one represents things and ideas, and the other neither things nor ideas in the first instance, but sounds, how could the former mode be abandoned, and the latter adopted, when the one though inconvenient seemed fitted to all the wants of the writer; and the other was not only untried, but was even of such a nature, as that no sagacity could conjecture its utility until subjected to reiterated trial?

It has been ascertained that the nations bordering on China, and which speak a different language, can read and understand the Chinese when written, though they cannot comprehend a word of it when spoken;* and in perusing a Chinese work, it is their own language they pronounce, and not that of China: and this because the characters represent things and ideas—not sounds. We should therefore be inclined to suppose that two natives of China might

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* Staunton's Account of the Embassy to China.—Vol. 3. p. 420. 2d. edit.

use different words, provided their meaning was similar, in reading the same passage. For example; one man, according as his style was familiar, formal or easy, compressed or diffuse, might read certain characters thus:—"The deeds of talented men weigh more than the precepts of wise ones."—Another:—"Genius that acts, is of more importance than Wisdom that declaims."—A third:—"The actions of the able are superior in value even to the words of the wise."—And there can be little doubt but that this was the case in the infancy of their written language. It has now, however, arrived at the highest perfection of which, perhaps, it is susceptible.—The prodigious number of its words, for each of which there is a separate character, comprehends a multitude of synonymes.—Most of the words are monosyllables; and as each is designated by a distinct character, the sound is as perfectly ascertained as if it was intentionally represented; and the only inconvenience, (but which is almost an insurmountable one), is the incredible number of characters that become necessary, when every word must have its own peculiar representative.

There was a time, however, among the Chinese, Egyptians, and other nations, using similar symbols, when the art of writing was yet in its infancy, and its progress in improvement but little advanced.—At such a period, the characters must have been confined in the strictest sense to the representation of things and ideas only; and in pronouncing them, any word might be used in the place of one which was

synonymous. The meaning might still be certain, though not so precise as if sounds had been represented by those characters; yet there could not be that strong necessity for the signs of sounds, which would be sufficient to instigate the mind to labour after so profound and recondite a discovery. What then, it may be asked, could create this strong necessity?—I reply, in a word, Poetry—and Poetry alone.

Circumstances may be picturesque and ideas poetical, but they do not constitute poetry, unless they are clad in the language of the Muses. The harmonious flow of sounds is the very essence of a poem; and to fix and consolidate their volatile and evanescent nature, to give them stability and render them permanent, can only be accomplished by marks which represent them; and not by the symbols of ideas, or the pictures of things. Hieroglyphics, or the improved characters to which Hieroglyphics in the first instance gave birth, could never have become the record of an *Iliad* or *Æneid*.—An alphabet was necessary to preserve them for succeeding ages.—Nay, without an alphabet, they would perhaps have perished during the very life of the poet who produced them; or possibly the most admired of his episodes would have continued their ephemeral existence, only so long as his memory could retain them. Let us then imagine a Homer, a Virgil, or a Milton, carried away by his sublime conceptions and the melody by which he gave them utterance—satisfied that they were worthy to excite emotions of delight and wonder in the latest posterity, yet per-

suaded that they were destined to vanish from existence, even at the moment they flowed from his lips—let us imagine those circumstances, and we shall have no difficulty in conceiving how an enthusiastic individual impressed with these emotions would exert every power of his intellect, to preserve from annihilation compositions which ought to be immortal. The motive would be sufficient for any labour of invention however surprising; and it may not be an uninteresting employment to discover, if possible, the progressive steps by which the task might have been accomplished.

Whether the inventor was of India, Chaldea, Phœnicia, or Egypt, he has not succeeded in transmitting to our days the verses which he intended to immortalise; or even a name that might justly rank, among the most illustrious of mankind, beyond that of Homer himself. Yet in the place of those works, for whose celebrity he perhaps alone was interested, he has bestowed upon us a gift of more value and interest than an hundred Iliads.—Not that it perpetuates those divine compositions which have humanised man, ameliorated his nature, and elevated his character with the traits of nobleness and magnanimity;—not that it has enabled him to record with unequivocal precision his observations and sentiments, and to argue, discuss, and ascertain with pre-eminent accuracy, every shade of probability, and limitation of truth within the cognisance of his faculties.—Not that it facilitates his progress in natural, moral, or intellectual philosophy, and the discovery of those simple and admirable laws

by which the earth and the universe, matter and mind are so wonderfully governed—but because this extraordinary gift, which I am almost tempted to call divine, even while I am proving it to be human, opens at once the doors of knowledge to all mankind:—roots up the labyrinths of darkness that surrounded every temple of science; and admits, not the philosopher, and the legislator only; but the citizen, the mechanic, the rustic, and the labourer—nay the whole mass of society, civilised or dawning into civilisation, within those portals, from which, without its simple but powerful assistance, it must have been helplessly and hopelessly excluded.

How little did the original inventor conceive the inherent powers of his invention, destined to be one day multiplied ten thousand fold, by the less profound, but no less important, discovery of Printing.—Little did he imagine that he had set a force in operation, which was to overturn ignorance and barbarism in every class of society, and we may venture to predict, in every horde of the species, however at present degraded, and pour over the surface of the globe in irresistible streams, the blessings of knowledge, liberty, and happiness.

But let us turn from the sublime effects to the lowly instrument and unconscious prime-mover. Let us endeavour to analyse the process, by which a human being might have contrived an arrangement, which collectively regarded, might not unreasonably be deemed beyond the reach of human ingenuity, yet when elucidated by the analysis which shall be immediately explained, the invention, it is believed,

will appear not merely a matter of possibility, but an event of natural occurrence.

Let us begin the investigation by tracing, if we can, the mode of proceeding which might have been adopted by any of our great epic poets, if he had not the means of recording his verses, yet was anxiously bent on transmitting them to posterity. Let us suppose Homer, Virgil, or Milton, labouring under this predicament, and endeavouring distinctly to note down the successive sounds which compose the first verses of the *Iliad*, *Æneid*, or *Paradise Lost*. Let us select one of this immortal triumvirate; and as the Latin Language is more uniform in its sounds than the English, and the Roman letter more convenient than the Greek for combining two or more characters into one, as will be found serviceable in explaining the process of the invention, let the Roman Poet on the present occasion be our guide.

Having composed and committed to memory the four first lines of the *Æneid*, he would have no difficulty in dividing the words into syllables as he pronounced them.

Ar-ma vi-rum-que ca-no, Tro-jæ qui pri-mus ab o-ris

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15.

I-ta-li-am, fa-to pro-fu-gus, La-vi-na-que ve-nit

16.17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30.

Li-to-ra: mul-tum il-le et ter-ris jac-ta-tus et al-to,

31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36.37.38.39.40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46.

Vi su-pe-rum, sæ-væ me-mo-rem Ju-no-nis ob i-ram.*

47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61.

* Numbers are placed under the several syllables that the reader may trace them in the subsequent tables.

But as every syllable would seem a simple sound, he would be under the necessity of noting each by a separate character. In the lines just quoted he would find sixty-one syllables; but as thirteen of them are repetitions, forty-eight characters would suffice to designate them. Having sufficiently familiarised himself with these characters, so as to recollect the sound by the sign, and the sign by the sound, he would naturally group together those signs which represented sounds bearing the slightest degree of resemblance to each other. In this process he would find his forty-eight characters arrange themselves in five columns, perhaps in the order in which I shall represent them. He might have chosen different configurations, straight or curved, simple or complicated, for *his* characters; but I shall select for *mine* such as will remind my reader of the sounds which they are intended to represent.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--------|-----|---------|-----|------|------|-------|-----|----------|-----|
| 1 | AR | 3 26 47 | VI. | 4 50 | RUM | 5 28 | QUE | 7 57 | NO. |
| 2 | MA | 10 | QU. | 12 | MIS | 9 | Æ. | 8 | RO. |
| 6. | CA | 11 | PRI | 23 | FU. | 29 52 | VE. | 14 | O. |
| 13 | AB. | 15 40 | RIS | 24 | GUS. | 37 | LE | 21 32 46 | TO |
| 17 42. | TA | 16 60 | I | 34 | ML | 38 44 | ET. | 22 | PRO |
| 19 | AM | 18 31 | LI | 35 | TM | 39 | TR | 54 | MO |
| 20. | EA | 30 | NI. | 48 | SU | 49 | PE | 59 | OB |
| 25. | EA | 36 | IL. | 43 | TUS. | 51 | SÆ. | | |
| 27. | NA. | 58 | NS. | 56 | II | 53 | ME. | | |
| 33. | RA. | | | | | 55. | REM | | |
| 41. | AC. | | | | | | | | |
| 45. | A. | | | | | | | | |
| 61. | RM. | | | | | | | | |

It is scarcely necessary to observe that in forming this arrangement he would naturally place, as I have done, the characters in the order in which the sounds occurred in the verses he was endeavouring to analyse.—For example, he would place *Ar* in the first column of the table ;—*ma* in the same column, *vi* in the second column, *rum* in the third, *que* in the fourth, *ca* in the first again, and *no* in the fifth ; and the prevailing sounds in the respective columns would not be in the order of our vowels, but thus:—a. i. u. e. o. and with respect to the situation of the characters in each column, they would be nearer the top or bottom in proportion as the sounds they represented were near the beginning or end of the verses submitted to this process. I have only to add that a person accustomed to pronounce the Latin language after the English fashion, may object to my arranging together sounds so dissimilar as *vi* and *ris*, *fu* and *mus* ; but there are strong grounds to believe that they were not so pronounced by Virgil. The Italians, the French, the Spanish, the Portuguese ;—in fact all those nations whose languages are derived to any extent from the Latin, for the most part agree in pronouncing *a* as in *all*, *i* as in *ill*, *o* as in *ore*, and *u* as in *pure* ; *e* sometimes as in *revere*, and sometimes as in *revery* ; and their evidence on this point has the force of four witnesses, testifying and corroborating the testimony of each other, that the Romans, from whom they derive their languages, transmitted to them also this mode of pronouncing them.

But to return to Virgil, and the task we have assigned him:—In separately studying the columns, as above arranged, he would perceive several sounds very closely resembling each other, yet at the same time distinctly different. I allude to the syllables which rhyme to each other, such as *ma, ca, fa, la*;—*no, to, pro, mo*, &c. He would clearly discover the simple sound *a* or *o* which he could distinctly pronounce, pervading all those rhymes; and he would at the same time ascertain that it was in every instance combined with another and different sound, which he could not separately articulate, but which, like an invisible elastic fluid in a chemical investigation, would satisfy him of its presence by its effects.

Now for the first time he would entertain sanguine hopes of success; and in the ardour of discovery he might possibly hasten to dissect, and assign distinct characters to the sounds in his several columns: or perhaps he would more systematically make a new arrangement of those columns, placing together in separate groups the several rhymes, for the purpose of entering on a more minute comparison of their component sounds. If such was a necessary step in the process, the following table may exhibit his new arrangement.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-------|-----------|---------|------------|------|------------|-------|------------|----------|------------|
| | <i>Ar</i> | 3 26 47 | <i>VI</i> | 4 50 | <i>RUM</i> | 5 28 | <i>QUE</i> | 7 57 | <i>NO</i> |
| | | 10 | <i>QU</i> | 35 | <i>TM</i> | 9 | <i>Æ</i> | 8 | <i>RO</i> |
| 2 | <i>MA</i> | 11 | <i>PRI</i> | | | 29 52 | <i>VE</i> | 14 | <i>O</i> |
| 6 | <i>CA</i> | 16 60 | <i>I</i> | 12 | <i>MIS</i> | 37 | <i>IE</i> | 21 32 46 | <i>TO</i> |
| 17 42 | <i>TE</i> | 18 31 | <i>LI</i> | 24 | <i>GUS</i> | 49 | <i>FE</i> | 22 | <i>PRO</i> |
| 20 | <i>E</i> | | | 43 | <i>TUS</i> | 51 | <i>SÆ</i> | 54 | <i>MO</i> |
| 25 | <i>A</i> | 15 40 | <i>RIS</i> | | | 53 | <i>ME</i> | | |
| 27 | <i>NA</i> | 58 | <i>NS</i> | 23 | <i>FU</i> | | | 59 | <i>OB</i> |
| 33 | <i>RA</i> | | | 48 | <i>SU</i> | 38 44 | <i>ET</i> | | |
| | | 30 | <i>NT</i> | 56 | <i>LI</i> | | | | |
| 13 | <i>AB</i> | | | | | 39 | <i>FR</i> | | |
| | | 36 | <i>IL</i> | 34 | <i>ML</i> | | | | |
| 19 | <i>AM</i> | | | | | 55 | <i>REM</i> | | |
| 61 | <i>RM</i> | | | | | | | | |
| 41 | <i>AC</i> | | | | | | | | |
| 45 | <i>A</i> | | | | | | | | |

In considering the first of the five columns in this table, he would scarcely in his early essays be able to ascertain whether the sound *Ar* at the head of the column were simple or compound, not having another sound of sufficient resemblance with which to compare it. He would therefore proceed to the next sound *ma* and would find ample scope for his sagacity, in comparing it with the six succeeding sounds: *ca*, *ta*, *fa*, *la*, *na*, *ra*; and surely it would not require the inspiration of heaven to enable him to discover

on comparing them, that the sound *a* existed in each, combined with another sound which could not be articulated without it. These indistinct sounds his mind could, however, embrace and discriminate. To make sure of his discovery he would affix a character to each, as well as to the articulate sound with which it was combined; and the first fruits of his labour would be the letters *a, m, c, t, f, l, n, r*. The discovery of the last mentioned letter would enable him to return to the analysis of the sound which he passed over at first; and as he had succeeded in finding that *ra* was composed of the sounds indicated by an *r* and an *a*, he would readily perceive that *Ar*, the first syllable of *Arma*, was but a transposition of the same sounds in the order *a. r*.

This minute circumstance can be but little interesting at present; yet no doubt it was of the highest importance to the inventor of the alphabet; for it furnished him with a test to discover whether a sound were simple or compound. In attempting to repeat in every possible way, any one of those sounds that have since been called vowels, it still remains the same, and cannot be inverted. It is therefore a simple sound. But combine it with another and the compound admits of an easy inversion: *ma* becomes *am*, *la*, becomes *al*, &c. After this discovery, the only difficulty that could occur, in considering the first column, would be the analysis of syllables composed of three sounds. The first that presents itself is *ram*, the last syllable of *iram*, and this

is no longer a difficulty. It has already been analysed ; and the sounds of which it is composed, arranged in the incipient alphabet under the characters *r, a, m,*

The same simple procedure would unravel the mysteries of the remaining four columns. To every sound he would affix its appropriate mark ; and to every mark he would assign but the power of representing one sound. No diphthongs would enter into his system.—They appear it is true in the verses selected from Virgil. But the Romans did not invent their own alphabet ; they borrowed it from the Greeks, as the Greeks borrowed theirs from the Phœnicians ; who, it may be said, are indebted for their alphabet to the Hebrews, as the old Hebrew or Samaritan characters are nearly the same as the Phœnician. It may still, however, be considered a disputable point, whether these people did not communicate their alphabet to the Hebrews, as well as to the Greeks. But the original inventor of the alphabet, whatever was his country, would naturally mark every sound in his language by a single character ; and those which are distinguished at present by the diphthongs *æ* and *œ* he would indicate simply by the character *e*.

It is remarkable that the analysis of the four first verses of the *Æneid* would have furnished its author, not only with all the vowels, but with fourteen consonants ; a number almost equal to that which exists in the modern alphabet. Were the same process to be exercised on the succeeding verses, the deficiency no doubt would soon be supplied, and

all the Latin characters appear in perfect array. Those elicited by the process we have just been supposing, would naturally occupy the following order, if taken as they appear in the last arrangement of the columns, beginning with the first and terminating with the fifth.

| | |
|-------|--|
| 1 A. | 14 I. |
| 2 M. | 15 P. |
| 3 C. | 16 S. |
| 4 T. | 17 G. |
| 5 F. | 18 E. |
| 6 L. | 19 O. |
| 7 N. | <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> 20 D.
21 H.
22 K.
23 W.
24 X.
25 Y.
26 Z. </div> <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle; font-size: 3em; line-height: 1;"> } </div> <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> Deficient. </div> </div> |
| 8 R. | |
| 9 B. | |
| 10 J. | |
| 11 V. | |
| 12 Q. | |
| 13 U. | |

And a glance of the eye will convince us that even these without any addition constitute an alphabet very nearly perfect: for with respect to the characters deficient, *d* is but the softened sound of *t*,—*h* but an aspiration.—*k* has the same power as *c* hard.—*w* is not necessary in Latin,

or the languages originating from it.—*x* is a compound of *c s*.—*y* differs little in its powers from *i*.—And *z* is but a softened *s*.

Every step the inventor advances, the easier he finds the succeeding. Having travelled through the analysis of the two first columns, he has already discovered three vowels and thirteen consonants; in the remaining three columns he has only two vowels and one consonant to add to his possessions, for all the other sounds, whether simple or complex to be found in those columns, have already been examined and arranged in his alphabet.

At this stage of the process, we cannot but reflect on the astonishment he must have experienced, on thus discovering the paucity of simple sounds existing in the complicated variety of a language. Sixty-one syllables, containing forty-eight distinct sounds, are reduced and simplified into nineteen; and these nineteen are found in prosecuting the investigation, to be nearly sufficient to represent the entire of a language. He might have previously reasoned himself into a conjecture that the simple sounds were much fewer in number than the compound; but until the completion of the experiment, the most sanguine imagination could never have approached within many degrees of the truth.

Thus might a single individual have brought to perfection this wonderful discovery. Indeed we are almost compelled to admit from its nature, that it could only have been

achieved by a single individual. Any progress one man might make before his ideas were completely developed could not possibly tend to assist any other. It is then natural to presume that we owe to the self-same mind, the conception of the plan; every stage of the process; and its perfect and final accomplishment, in so far at least as the compass extended of the sounds which he had occasion to represent: and from this original invention, it can scarcely be doubted, were copied all the alphabets entitled to the name, which ever existed.

Astle, it is true, whose laborious and extensive researches on the subject entitle his opinion to the utmost attention and deference, asserts that several of the Asiatic alphabets, which differ in the names, number, and power of the characters from the Phœnician, and those of which it was the source, must have been altogether of a separate and undervived origin; and that it is most liberal as well as rational to suppose that different men at different times thought of making marks for sounds, instead of marks for things.* But strong as are the facts which he adduces, I am unable to divest myself of the opinion that the author of any alphabet, posterior to that originally invented, must have been previously acquainted either with it or some other derived from it; and that where no traces of similitude are

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* See the 4th chapter of Astle on the Origin and Progress of Writing.

observable, that he adopted at least the principle on which those prior alphabets were formed ;—rejecting their characters, either on account of some difficulty in applying them to a language requiring very different powers to designate its sounds ; or perhaps from the vanity of encountering greater difficulties, and a wish to be considered an original inventor. Yet any man's ambition ought to be sufficiently gratified by the mere act of bestowing so inappreciable a gift upon his nation. What would not the Chinese owe to the individual, who could persuade their government to encourage the use of our characters, in place of that cumbersome and unmanageable machinery, which, if not the sole, has been the principal obstacle to their progress in the fine arts, literature, and science, the cultivation of the mind, and the intellectual embellishment of society.

It may be said that what has been done once may be done again. But so many circumstances must have concurred in the discovery of alphabetic writing, even in the simplified view we have been considering, that it seems to present, at least, one obstacle to the general application of the remark. If there be any plausibility in the process I have detailed, we can scarcely suppose that a plurality of individuals could have arisen in different ages and nations, qualified for the accomplishment of such a task ;—all of them poets—all producing poems worthy, at least in their own estimation, of descending to after ages—all eager and enthusiastic to find a certain and permanent record for their verses ;—

all, thus prompted to the undertaking, in possession at the same time of the means of carrying it into execution:—a comprehension which could survey the intricate mazes of a language, and suspect that the whole might be reduced to a few simple sounds—a judgment that could decide on the possibility of designating those sounds, which inferior powers of discrimination would deem as difficult to delineate as pictures of odours, and tastes, and internal sensations:—a sagacity and genius fit to discover seeming impossibilities to be possible—and an indefatigable and pertinacious perseverance, *that* most efficient attribute of great minds, which demonstrates the possibility of an enterprise by its actual performance.

If this combination of circumstances, motives and qualifications must have concurred in the production of alphabetic writing, is it probable that such a conjunction should occur more than once? I admit that it is possible—but to my understanding, it is equally possible that a knowledge of the circulation of the blood, and the laws of gravitation, might also be discovered in different countries and times; and that Harveys and Newtons are to be esteemed but common productions of nature.

If it be admitted that the elementary alphabet may have owed its birth to poetry, it must also be confessed that the syllabic alphabets of the Ethiopians and Tartars* must have

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* See Goguet's *origin of Laws, Arts and Sciences*.—Vol. 1st. p. 178. And Rees's *Encyclopedia*. Article Alphabet.

had a similar origin. It might therefore be supposed that long after the invention of a syllabic alphabet, it might have served as a step to the invention of the other. But this conjecture, though a natural one, seems not to be well founded. The powerful mind that invented alphabetic writing could have derived but little assistance from so weak an auxiliary—It would have been but an impediment to his progress; and by furnishing him with the means, however operose and unwieldy, of transmitting his verses to posterity, would have deprived him of the strongest incentive to the attempt.

This, however, must remain a doubtful question; but it is easy to perceive that in refining on the discovery of the original inventor, other ingenious persons may have contributed additional letters if ~~other sounds~~ should be detected which he had omitted to note; or adopting the ~~principle~~ and rejecting the characters, applied a new set of those arbitrary signs to represent some other language with which they harmonised better; while others may have formed a new arrangement of the original characters, in support of some system, or for the purpose of more easily instructing the ignorant. Yet when we look over the generality of alphabets, nothing like system or arrangement appears. Vowels and consonants, liquids and mutes—the representatives of every sort of sound, whether labial, dental, palatine, or nasal, are

hustled together, without distinction or order, apparently as they issued at first from the brain that conceived them. Nor would this be an unimportant observation, were we fortunate enough to possess many of the writings of the primitive times: because it would furnish a test for discovering the most ancient production in which alphabetic writing was used. if it happened that such a production were still in existence. For if on an analysis of the first lines of the work into their elementary sounds, by the process which I have endeavoured to describe, the characters representing those sounds should arrange themselves in the order of the alphabet—I mean the alphabet of the language in which the work was composed—little doubt could remain, that alphabetic writing was used for the first time in recording that very composition; and was *invented* in the anxiety of its author, to snatch from dissolution the perishable sounds of which it consisted.

Such an expectation is not now to be entertained; and even if it might, the investigation could scarcely be desirable except to a mere antiquarian. A similar remark, perhaps, may be made upon the discussion that has already detained us so long.—I have nothing to say in its defence.—It examines a question of mere idle curiosity; and is scarcely interesting even to a few.—It is useless and unnecessary to any purpose or end—unless, indeed, it may be supposed of advantage, to open a more favourable view of the powers of the human mind, and that it shall be considered, not altoge-

ther fruitless or unserviceable to convince the unprejudiced, even by a single instance, that the best and only mode of overcoming similar difficulties, is to persuade ourselves that they are not insurmountable; and to encounter them by patient discrimination, and gradual, slow, and circumspect induction.—satisfied that it is unphilosophic, inconsiderate, and puerile to disentangle every perplexity, by resorting to miraculous interposition, where a little sagacity will reduce the achievement to the exertions of that reason, and those energies with which the Creator in his munificence has endowed mankind.